Topical Reports

I. Trans-Pacific Contacts

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The list of publications given below reflects the broad nature of the topic of Trans-Pacific contacts; the problems of Polynesian origins and navigational skills; the distributions of cultivated and other plants and the theoretical background of diffusion studies generally. The paper by Tolstoy is outstanding; with its rigorous scientific method in the study of diffusion it provides one of our best ‘proofs’ of Trans-Pacific contacts.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

CARTER, GEORGE F.


The distribution of certain cultivated plants and of weeds in the Pacific area show extensive and repeated contacts between Asia, the Pacific Islands, and America. This view is based on certain historically known instances of plant transfers that occurred only through long and repeated contacts.

EKHOLM, GORDON F.


ESTRADA, EMILIO and CLIFFORD EVANS


The archeologically known culture history of Ecuador is concisely summarized. The two authors visualize two cultural intrusions from Asia, one at about 2500 B.C. from the Jomon culture of Japan and another at about 200 B.C. from a less well defined source in eastern Asia.

FERDON, EDWIN N. JR


The problem of Polynesian origins and diffusion is shown to be far more complex than has been thought in the past. There exist several possible sources of origin, and, due to the character of ocean voyaging, a regular island-to-island diffusion pattern need not be expected.

GOLSON, JACK (editor)


Theories of trans-Pacific contacts depend in large part on other theories concerning the sailing and navigational skills of early peoples. This symposium reviewed Andrew Sharp’s thesis that the Pacific Islands were settled primarily through accidental or drift voyages. A long critique of Sharp’s views by G. S. Parsonson (pp. 11-63) is especially cogent and valuable.
Heyerdahl, Thor

Several cultivated or useful plants of Easter Island, including the totora reed and the sweet potato, are thought to have been introduced from the Americas while other Polynesian plants have clearly been brought in by voyages from the west.

Li Hui-Lin 李惠林

Two Sung geographical works refer to the land of the Arabs and to a strange country still farther to the west that is reached by a hundred days of sailing in large ships. It is suggested that this land might be best identified as South America.

Meggers, Betty J.

The summary of an excellent symposium reviewing current knowledge of the archaeology of Latin America. The great importance of diffusion between the several centres of New World cultures is emphasized, and various comments on the probability of trans-Pacific relationships are included.

Smith, C. Earle Jr. and MacNeish, Richard S.

Fragments of a single cotton boll are reported from Coxcatlan Cave at Tehuacan, Mexico, in levels dated at about 5800 B.C. This appears to invalidate the widely held theory that the Old World element of the hybrid American cotton was probably brought from Asia by man.

Swadesh, Morris

The principles involved in studying the relationship and origins of the American Indian languages are discussed and it is shown that remote relationships to Asiatic languages must exist. Linguistic borrowings that might be the result of trans-Pacific contacts are also considered.

Tolstoy, Paul

The methods being used in a world-wide study of bark-cloth manufacture still in progress are summarized. Notable similarities between the industries of Southeast Asia and Mesoamerica are highly indicative of historic relationship. The author thinks that the industry was introduced into Mesoamerica in the early part of the first millenium B.C.

Vokes, Emily H.

Some of the shells depicted on the façade of the Temple of Quetzalcoatl at Teotihuacan can be identified according to the author as the West Indian Chank, a shell closely related to the ‘Sacred Chank’ of India. This ceremonial use of the same kind of shell in the two areas may be significant.